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17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Describes study measuring achievement of correspondence study students in introductory course in psychology as compared with that attained by students in regular classes taught by the instructor who prepared the correspondence course. All students used the same textbook.

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Performance of Correspondence-Study Students[1]

Evaluation of the effectiveness of correspondence study, especially as a means of obtaining college credit, presents a number of problems. Particularly is this true in subjects in which it is difficult to compare achievement under this method of study with that attained by students in regular classes.

Such a comparison was possible when several sections of the introductory course in psychology on the University of Wisconsin campus were taught by the same instructor who prepared the correspondence course.[2] During the second semester, 1955, we obtained an achievement measure on resident students, taught by the same instructor and using the same textbook, by employing examination items which were included in the examination for the correspondence-study course. Thus it has been possible to compare achievement under the two methods of instruction with control of some of the variables which ordinarily would seriously limit the interpretation of such a comparison. The performance of the correspondence-study group did not differ from that of a campus group.

[1]Reported by Dale W. Dysinger, formerly of the University Extension Division, University of Wisconsin, now of Psychological Service of Pittsburgh; and C. S. Bridgman, University Extension Division, University of Wisconsin.

[2]The materials for the credit course in introductory psychology used by the Extension Division were arranged by Frederick A. Mote, Chairman of the University Department of Psychology. His cooperation in this project is gratefully acknowledged.

Eighty-six multiple-choice questions from the final examination of the correspondence-study course were included on the final examination for the resident course. The final examinations of 41 correspondence-study students and 167 students in the regular course were rescored on these 86 items. The following table presents the mean scores obtained by the two groups:

	Correspondence Study	Regular
Mean	58.93	58.32
Standard deviation	11.03	12.37
Number	41	167

The difference between means is not significant ($t=0.29$). Sixteen correspondence students took the course for University credit. The mean score of this group was 63.18. However, the difference in favor of the correspondence students was not significant by ordinary standards ($t=1.65$; $p=.10$).

In addition, information on item difficulty was obtained by noting the number in each group who failed each question. The difficulty level of the items was similar for the two groups. An attempt was made to characterize the items that were more difficult for the correspondence-study students or more difficult for students in residence. No consistent pattern was discovered.

It must be remembered that the groups differed not only in the way the material was presented, but also in age and reasons for taking the course. There was no control of the basic scholastic ability levels in the

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two groups. In addition, many who enroll for correspondence study do not complete the work and take the final examination. Thus, there is a selective effect on the type of student who completes the course by correspondence, although experience indicates that many factors in addition to ability contribute to this selection.

Because of the uncontrolled variables, it is possible to conclude only that the achievement of the group completing the course by correspondence was equivalent to that of regular students. This is an interesting and valuable finding in its own right, but it leaves open the basic question of the relative effectiveness of the two methods of instruction, although it seems fair to suppose that the two methods cannot differ greatly in this regard, in view of the results.